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**1****GROWING UP IN  
EAST BROOKFIELD**

The Irish had a bad year in 1846, finishing last in the international league. For the third straight year, the potato crop had failed like a staff of sore-armed pitchers. Without potatoes, there was nothing to eat: no meat, no bread, no vegetables. They had no seeds or tools to grow anything else. There was no work, no money. It was human existence at its lowest level. Thousands died of fever and starvation-induced diseases. Over the next decade, a million members of the Ireland team declared themselves free agents and jumped to the new world. In one year alone, more than 37,000 of them arrived in Boston, swelling that city's population by one-third. They found no welcome mat. Boston considered itself the Hub of the Universe—The Hub became a widely used sportswriters' jargon for the city—the Athens of America. The Brahmins who ruled it deplored the influx of Irish immigrants. They hired a marshal to maintain civil order and protect property.

A study of the immigration records gives the impression that half of the new arrivals were McGillicuddys or MacGilycuddys or some other variation of the name. And of those, every other man appears to have been a Cornelius, with Dennis and Michael distant seconds. Among the women, there is an abundance of Marys, Margarets, and Ellens. For the researcher, this presents a thicket to hack through in the hope of finding the subjects of the search.

It is little wonder that during Connie Mack's long years of fame, many people with a McGillicuddy hanging from some branch of their family tree claimed to be related to him. One Boston McGillicuddy named Dennis told the newspapers he was Mack's long-lost brother. Mack complained to his real cousin, May Dempsey, "This fellow claims to be related to me. He picks me up in his car and takes up a lot of my time, but I don't know how he's related."

He wasn't. But Connie Mack never confronted a claimant to kinship with demands of proof before agreeing to leave a pair of Annie Oakleys at the pass gate.

Despite the knots of Old Country roots, a journey through the live leads and dead ends of town and church and military and census records, from Whitefield Parish in County Kerry to Massachusetts and Missouri, produces a substantial vine, if not a complete tree, of the family of Connie Mack. Its breadth suggests that there were and remain today legitimate cousins by the dozens, of first-, second-, and third-degree status. There could have been more; Connie Mack's uncle Thomas and his wife, Julia, had seven children, but five died before reaching the age of eight.

The McGillicuddys who crossed the ocean left behind a glorious past, filled with centuries of heroic military victories by their ancestral chiefs of the area around the McGillicuddy Reeks, Ireland's highest peaks, in southwest County Kerry. There is some evidence that they were a branch of the O'Sullivan More family, which might explain the family motto: "No hand is stronger in generosity than the hand of O'Sullivan."

Unfortunately for their descendants, the McGillicuddys forfeited most of their castles and vast landholdings as a result of being on the losing side in the playoffs against King James I, who seized land from Irish Catholics and gave it to English and Irish Protestants in the seventeenth century. Still, it might have been worse. Connie Mack's ancestors could have been among the thousands of Irish captives shipped off to the West Indies and sold into slavery by Oliver Cromwell during the Civil War that began in 1642. Mack might have wound up managing Fidel Castro and the Cuban All-Stars.

At any rate, there were enough McGillicuddys left for hundreds of them to pour into Boston and New York in the mid-nineteenth century. They came mostly as laborers or servant girls, on ships with names like *Moses Wheeler*, *Siberia*, *Cephalonia*, *Cambria*, and *Chariot of Fame*. Passage cost the equivalent of about twenty-three "New York dollars," a month's wages for many workers. The voyage took from six weeks to three months. More than four hundred steerage passengers were packed into overcrowded holds, subsisting on weekly rations of seven pounds of food per person, chronic shortages of potable water, and stifling air reeking from dysentery. Few of these "coffin ships" made the crossing without some passengers dying. But nothing they endured was worse than what they left behind, despite their immediate sense of loss and homesickness and the fear of the unknown that lay ahead. They had, at least, expectations, and that was a step up on

the ladder of hope. For many of the women, unable to read or write, the future meant bearing children and heartaches with equal frequency.

So it was that the present was bleak and the future invisible in Ireland when, sometime in 1846, Cornelius and Ellen Joy McGillicuddy held their American Wake, as the mournful farewell gatherings were called, and said good-bye to at least six of their children they never expected to see again. Like millions of others of all ages, the children disappeared on ships bound for America. (Two of their cousins went to Argentina; a descendant of one of them, Eduardo McGillicuddy, became the Uruguayan ambassador to the United States.)

There is a gap in the passenger lists for ships arriving in Boston and New York around that time, so it is uncertain where the McGillicuddy children landed or whether they all arrived together. Davis Buckley, a Washington architect whose great-grandmother was one of them, believes that three of them arrived in New York on the same ship.

Those who can be identified with some degree of certainty include Thomas, age twenty or twenty-one; Patrick, nineteen; Michael, nine or ten; Cornelius, seven; and Mary Agnes, six. (Ages are best-efforts calculations; census, marriage, military, pension, and death records are like a shack built with no plumb walls—they seldom squared. A person could age nine years or twelve in the decade between census counts.) They made their way to the Worcester-Brookfield area in central Massachusetts. Mary Agnes met a man named David Roach in Connecticut, married him, and moved to Jersey County, Illinois, where they began a family of nine children. One of them, Cornelius, became a prominent politician and newspaper publisher in Missouri and a close friend of Connie Mack. Cornelius sired fourteen little Roaches, spreading the Midwestern branch of the family tree.

The rest remained in the Worcester area. The earliest record of Michael's residence in East Brookfield, fifteen miles west of Worcester, appears in 1853, when he was seventeen.

During these troubled 1840s, the children of Michael McKillop (or McKillup) were making plans to emigrate from the Catholic section of Belfast. Originally from Scotland, they traced their roots back to the McDonnell clan (of the red and black tartan and red lion), who were driven out of the highlands when their land was confiscated during the Reformation in the sixteenth century. They had fled to Ireland. Now they were fleeing poverty.

The McKillops included at least one boy, John, and three girls, Nancy, Sarah, and Mary. John and Nancy came first; family lore has it that Nancy became homesick as soon as she lost sight of land and prayed that the boat would turn back. A few years later, in early 1856, Nancy went to the docks in Boston expecting to greet her sister Sarah and was surprised when fifteen-year-old Mary got off the boat instead. (Sarah went to Australia.)

The sisters lived in Worcester, where Mary met Michael McGillicuddy. Michael stood about five-foot-seven; Mary barely reached five feet. Neither could read or write. Eventually Michael learned to write his name, signing it in a variety of spellings—Michel, Meichael, Michall—and sometimes simply making an X. Mary was about sixty before she could read or sign her name.

They were married on October 21, 1856, by Fr. J. Boyce in a Catholic church in Worcester. Michael gave his occupation as day laborer and his age as twenty-one; he was probably born September 27, 1836 or '37, and was no more than twenty. Mary said she was eighteen, but she was at most sixteen, probably born in June 1840.

The young couple rented a small frame house on the corner of Main and Maple Streets in East Brookfield, one block from the center of the village. Their landlords, Joseph and Mary McCarty, befriended the newlyweds and treated them as family. Main Street, designated by Postmaster General Benjamin Franklin as a Post Road in 1753, was a busy thoroughfare. Stagecoaches traveling through town churned up clouds of dust on the unpaved road. Every mile was marked by a milestone. One such stone, a reddish rock about four feet high and a foot wide, with “Miles from Boston 62” chiseled into it, stood by the road in front of the house. It stands there today.

East Brookfield, with a population of about three hundred, and three other villages—Brookfield, North Brookfield, and West Brookfield—made up the township of Brookfield. They were busy centers of potteries, boot and shoe factories, wool and cotton mills, and wagon manufacturers.

Mary was a city girl. She didn't like the isolation, the dust and mud, the swampland and algae-covered ponds that surrounded the village. She was seven months pregnant when she escaped for a day to attend her sister Nancy's wedding to Cornelius Sullivan in Worcester on June 6, 1857. (Nancy had three daughters, one of whom married a man named Dempsey. The Dempseys had ten children, whose undeniable status as Connie Mack's second cousins made them a close part of his widely extended family. He and the Dempseys visited often in each other's homes.)

When her time drew near, Mary dreaded the prospect of giving birth to her first child among strangers. She traveled to her brother John's home in Belchertown, twenty miles away, where his wife and daughters were eager to care for her. There Michael Jr. was born on August 23, 1857. Family tradition decreed that there must always be a Cornelius in the lineage, but a Junior could take precedence. Three years later a daughter, Ellen, whom they called Nellie, was born in the house in East Brookfield. Nellie was baptized on August 19; her sponsors were Joseph McCarty and her uncle Patrick's wife, Ellen.

Eight months after the Civil War began, Patrick was the first of the family to sign up, enlisting for three years on December 13, 1861. Listing his occupation as polisher, which could have been at one of the potteries or boot factories, he was mustered into the Twenty-second Massachusetts on January 26, 1862, and discharged three years later in New Orleans.

Michael was now a wheelwright, earning \$2 a day. Mary was in her fifth month, carrying her third child, when the Fifty-first Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry came through the Brookfields, recruiting to fill its share of the state's quota of nine-month enlistees. The bounty of \$150 must have looked as enticing as the opportunity to take off on a nine-month adventure; on August 30, 1862, Michael became a "Bounty," as the nine-month enlistees were called. Thirty days later he reported to Company B at nearby Camp Wool. After three weeks of rudimentary training, the company took a train to Boston, then boarded the transport ship *Merrimac*, bound for North Carolina.

Two other McGillicuddys, Daniel and James, had enlisted in September in Medford, Massachusetts. Daniel was in sick bay at the New Bern, North Carolina, barracks when Michael arrived on November 30 after a rough voyage. More men died from disease than in battle during the war, and Daniel was one of them. He died on December 1 from a hemorrhage of the lungs. The records show that his belongings were given to a cousin, who may have been Michael.

Company B was assigned to guard a wagon train during the battle of Goldsboro. Michael had just returned to the barracks on the Trent River, near New Bern, when Mary went into labor in the house on Main Street on the evening of Monday, December 22. Mary McCarty was with her. Between the mother's pain-filled screams and the newborn boy's crying, they did not notice when the town clock struck midnight. But five-year-old Michael Junior, shooed out of the house, had no doubts.

“It was definitely before twelve when I went around telling people I had a brother,” he recalled.

The town clerk, Washington Tufts, entered the date as December 22 in the town records and on the birth certificate, which spells the name “McGillycuddy.” But until he was past eighty, Connie Mack celebrated his birthday on December 23. When a relative sent him a copy of the records, Mack chuckled, “Well, it made me feel younger to believe it was the twenty-third.”

On January 4, 1863, Mary, accompanied by Mary McCarty and Patrick McDonald as sponsors, brought her infant son to Our Lady of the Rosary Church in Spencer, three miles away, where he was baptized by Fr. Thomas Sheerin as “Cornelius son of Michael McGilichoddy & Mary McGillup his wife, born 22d Dec., 1862.”

Contrary to every baseball reference book and numerous articles, profiles, and books in which he is mentioned, Connie Mack was not named Cornelius Alexander. His baptismal and marriage records contain no mention of “Alexander” or any other middle name or initial. It may have been a name he took at confirmation, but no confirmation record could be found. There are no legal documents, including his will, or certificates of incorporation, on which everyone else who is listed uses a middle initial, where Cornelius McGillycuddy ever used one.

Three of his daughters were certain there was a middle initial A, though they never saw it. One thought it stood for Alexander. Another was sure it was Andrew and named her son Cornelius Andrew for that reason. The third remembered giggling with her teenage girl friends because she had heard it was Aloysius and that sounded like such a funny name to them. (A son, Connie Jr., had no middle name when he was baptized. He took the name Alexander at his confirmation but never used it. That may be the reason historians retroactively grafted it onto his father’s name.)

In January 1863 Michael McGillycuddy went on the sick list in New Bern. Suffering from what soldiers called “the southern malaria,” chronic diarrhea, dyspepsia, rheumatism, and kidney and liver problems, he spent most of the rest of his enlistment in the hospital. About the only ailment he seemed to have escaped was the meningitis that devastated more than one regiment that winter.

The Fifty-first arrived back in Massachusetts on July 21, 1863. After a six-day furlough, it was reassembled and mustered out on July 27. Michael had last been paid on February 2; he had been advanced \$43.59, in kind or cash,

for clothing and had no money coming to him. When he reached home, he was expelling water from his lungs and suffering from “smothering spells” and stomach trouble. Dr. Fiske was called in to see him the next day and continued to treat him for years thereafter. Michael was twenty-six, broke and broken, and would never again be the man he had been when he had signed on as a Bounty nine months earlier.

When Connie was about four, the family moved a mile away into a tiny one-floor cottage they rented from John and Julia Stone for \$6 a month. Located just above the bend where the road to North Brookfield curved off Main Street, the quarter-acre lot backed up to Mud Pond. A nearby Franklin milestone, still standing, reads “Boston 63 miles.” Across the road was an open field, E. H. Stoddard’s vegetable farm and stand, and the Forbes general store. In that cottage Dennis McGillicuddy was born in April 1867.

Almost from the day of his discharge, Michael began to draw a monthly disability pension that rose to \$8 after twenty-three years. In 1879 the state created a pension for disabled soldiers, but there is no record of his collecting it until 1885. When his health permitted, Michael worked first at a cotton mill, then at the Forbes wheel and wagon shop.

Connie started school at the age of five in September 1868. He walked with Michael Jr. and Nellie to the large brick one-room schoolhouse. The first grade curriculum concentrated on reading, writing, spelling, and counting to one hundred. Michael was in the sixth grade, tackling arithmetic, U.S. geography, penmanship, and “object lessons,” in addition to reading and spelling. In third grade, Nellie was doing a little primary arithmetic and sharing the daily ten-minute lesson from *Hooker’s Child’s Book of Nature* that the teacher read aloud to all the students.

There were three terms of ten weeks each, separated by long vacations. A high school had recently been built; it would be eight years before a class of one graduated from it.

Just off the schoolroom was a small, windowless closet, dark as moonless midnight—the dreaded punishment room. Connie once served a ten-minute sentence in the hole that “gave me the biggest scare that I had ever had, up to that time, in my life. I took good care I didn’t go back a second time.”

But others did. Despite the small enrollment—one year attendance varied between six and sixteen—it wasn’t easy to keep order or do much teaching. The range in ages was formidable, from five to at least fifteen. When Connie was ten, they wore out three teachers, none lasting more than one term. Perhaps it was difficult to attract committed schoolmarms for \$88 a

term, \$105.60 for the winter term. When enrollment went up unexpectedly one year, the teacher received an additional fifty cents a week for hazardous duty.

The school board's cautions against corporal punishment may have contributed to the discipline problems. "If resorted to by the teacher," it warned, "it should be for gross sins only. The system of pinching, hipping, slapping, pulling hair, springing whalebone on the lips, jerking, boxing, and a long catalog of brutal ways of punishment are condemned."

Other regulations posted in the classroom suggest that little learning was being accomplished:

"All standing, walking or running or playing on the seats or desks, or wrestling or scuffling in the schoolroom is positively forbidden. No person, while chewing tobacco, shall spit on the floor of said house or on the seats, desks or ceiling of the room."

(Nothing has changed in education: the school board's annual report noted, "Specialty has been made of reading, spelling and writing, studies heretofore too much neglected.")

Two houses away from Connie's home on the North Brookfield Road lived the Drake family. Young Connie sat by the hour, listening with fascination to the stories Eddie Drake told about his Civil War adventures. In June 1862, fourteen-year-old Eddie said he was seventeen and enlisted as a drummer boy. Wounded at Lynchburg, Virginia, he was taken prisoner in June 1864. In December, during a swap of one hundred Union prisoners for an equal number of Confederate captives, Eddie burrowed into the group unseen and was freed at Charleston, South Carolina. He came out of the war suffering from chemical dropsy and an enlarged spleen and was discharged on May 2, 1863. The older boy was a constant source of wonders for Connie, who was seven when he watched Eddie making a new product called soda pop in the Drakes' cellar, which had been turned into the home of the Aerated Works Company.

Another of Connie's earliest memories was of the large open field across the road, which served as the ball grounds for the kids in the area. An elderly Connie Mack said he could still hear the voice of one of his friends—Swats Mulligan or Will or Jack Hogan—calling, "Hey, Slats, come on over and play four-o-cat." Connie's tall-for-his-age and skinny build had quickly earned him that nickname. Whoever was calling, Connie always responded eagerly.

"We made two rings thirty feet apart, with a batter in each ring. A pitcher